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ABSTRACT

Midlife divorce for women can be a time for creative growth or divorce can lead to loneliness, bitterness, and depression. Middle-aged women appear to experience an inordinate amount of stress from divorce because of loss of roles and lack of new role models. Based upon role theory and divorce as a normal developmental process, a feminist archetypal theory was developed as a method for creating new role models or new archetypes for middle-aged women. Feminist archetypal theory is useful because contemporary society is built upon patriarchial archetypes which often define women only in their relation to men. Women ages 45 to 65 have been socialized to marry, have children, and assume family caretaker roles. Often these women are used to a dependent role. It is recommended that midlife divorced women examine their role assumptions and develop new archetypes to improve their divorce adjustment. The Greek goddesses, Gaia, Demeter, Artemis, and Hera, and the Sumerian goddess, Inanna, as well as the Great Goddess, or mother earth goddess, are possible archetypes. Through meditation, dream interpretation, divorce support groups, individual psychotherapy, women's new religious groups, reading, and religious questioning, middle-aged divorced women can use the divorce crisis as a time of constructive developmental growth.
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Running head: MIDLIFE DIVORCE

Abstract

Midlife divorce for women can be a time for creative growth or divorce can lead to loneliness, bitterness, and depression. Middle-aged women appear to experience an inordinate amount of stress from divorce because of loss of roles and lack of new role models. Based upon role theory and divorce as a normal developmental process, this paper presents a feminist archetypal theory as a method for creating new role models or new archetypes for middle-aged women. Feminist archetypal theory is useful because contemporary society is built upon patriarchal archetypes which often define women only in their relation to men. Women ages 45 to 65 have been socialized to marry, have children, and assume family caretaker roles. Often these women are used to a dependent role. It is recommended that midlife divorced women examine their role assumptions and develop new archetypes to improve their divorce adjustment. The Greek goddesses, Gaia, Demeter, Artemis, and Hera, and the Sumerian goddess, Inanna, as well as the Great Goddess, or mother earth goddess, are suggested. Through meditation, dream interpretation, divorce support groups, individual psychotherapy, women's new religious groups, reading, and religious questioning, middle-aged divorced women can use the divorce crisis as a time of constructive developmental growth.

Midlife Divorce and Archetypes for Women

Life crises such as divorce can be times for tremendous personal growth. Nevertheless, the crisis of divorce for middle-aged women often is not a time of growth, but a time leading to bitterness, loneliness, and despair. A prominent theory for poor divorce adjustment is diminished self-esteem relating to loss of roles (Rice & Rice, 1986).

Using role theory to understand midlife divorce for women, it can be seen that women undergoing midlife divorce suffer major role losses as wife and caretaker of the family. The American dream of the happy nuclear family is destroyed at the time when the benefits of family life seem to be most realizeable. The children are almost grown, financial security is often present, and it seems time to relax and enjoy the fruits of their family role. Women ages 45 to 65 in contemporary American culture have been socialized to marry, have children, and take care of the family. Loss of this caregiving role through divorce and family disruption is especially serious for middle-age women as other roles are often not present. Traditional role models are no longer meaningful and new roles are not easily available. These women may be displaced homemakers who thought their caregiving role would last throughout

their lifetimes (Burden & Gottlieb, 1987).

The story for midlife divorce is frequently very similar, i.e. a marriage of 15-25 years, almost grown children, a comfortable standard of living based on the husband's career, and then a marriage dissolved. In 1979 approximately one and a half million women between the ages of 45 and 64 (or 7% of middle-aged women) classified their marital status as divorced (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1981). Sixteen percent of recent divorces occurred among women ages 45 and over (Burden & Gottlieb, 1987). Also, approximately 28% of women ages 45 to 64 in 1979 were living without a husband. By the year 2010, it is predicted that the population of middle-aged people will increase from the 1979 count by 5%. Thus midlife divorced women could number over two and a half million by the year 2010. As in the past when most women could expect to be widows at some time in their lives, now women can perceive divorce as a frequently expected occurrence.

How do middle aged women adjust to the many divorce-related problems in new financial, career, parenting, and relationship roles? Wallerstein (1986) gives grim results of what happens emotionally to some women 40 and older. Ten years after divorce, Wallerstein's clinical sample of older women were

depressed, lonely, and bitter. None had remarried; none were in a stable relationship. Wallerstein notes that women this age have a 28% chance of remarriage. About 40% of the women remained angry and continued to feel rejected and exploited.

The continued depression of middle-aged divorced women may be tied to unobtainable goals. Expectations for the future may be as important as the actual changes taking place due to divorce (Hetherington, 1984). Women with expectations only for the role of living as a married person may continue to long for the former husband, they may remain hostile and angry toward the ex-husband, and they may chronically feel guilt and self-pity.

More positive adjustment to divorce may come from viewing divorce as a normal developmental process. This perception may be emerging in Western culture (Rice & Rice, 1986). Divorce as a normal developmental process sees divorce as part of the cycle between intimacy and self-identity or communion and separation which describe adult developmental stages. Using this theory, divorce is a point for increased self-identity at the expense of intimacy with a significant other. The self-identity of being oneself without being the spouse of another is developed through

the divorce experience. Middle-aged women may not have ever completed a healthy individuation stage before they married, i.e. they may have substituted the symbiotic relationship with parents for a dependency relationship with the husband. After divorce and a healthy individuation process, women often experience bursts of psychic energy and increased life satisfaction due to this developmental leap.

As women search for new identities and new roles, the traditional patriarchal Judeo-Christian beliefs of Western civilization may not provide what women need. Feminist archetypal theory gives a way for women's individuation, and especially for middle aged divorced women. Feminist archetypal theorists have up-dated Jung's archetypal theory and incorporated ideas from the new women's theology movement. This paper offers feminist archetypal theory as a means to providing meaningful role models for middle-aged divorcing women.

Jung's Archetypal Theory

Jung's archetypal theory offers a basis to developing new positive role models for middle-aged divorced women. Jung (1964) describes archetypes as innate, inherited images which form patterns or representations of mythological themes. Specific representations may change but the primordial patterns

such as Divine Mother and Wise Old Man remain. Jung's theory of archetype has been criticized for its claim to a genetic, biological basis; most theorists now accept only a cultural inheritance of archetypes (Hall & Lindzey, 1957).

Jung's idea of bringing the unconscious archetypes to consciousness greatly applies to those undergoing midlife crisis. Archetypal images may be below or in the unconscious, yet they influence the self-perceptions women have of themselves. By examining archetypes from the unconscious through dreams, meditation, consciousness raising discussion, and therapy, divorced women can reflect on the assumptions they have for their self identity and life roles. Inadequate cultural archetypes which create problems in self-concept can be replaced.

Feminist Archetypal Theory

Feminist archetypal theory, which is based upon Jungian theory and depth psychology, offers an expanded archetypal theory. Archetypes are viewed as useful models for explaining reality (Wehr, 1985). Feminist archetypal theory, flexible and evolving, is more open than Jung's theories of pre-existing archetypes. In contrast to Jung's genetic-mystical theory, feminist archetypal theory sees archetypes as simply socially

constructed ideas. Archetypes do not exist beyond humans although they can be unconscious. Nevertheless, culturally created archetypes exert great power over individuals as they are methods cultures use to structure society. Cultures create and promulgate archetypes through religious and social institutions to maintain the order of society. Yet cultural models evolve to fit the changing society.

Feminist archetypal theory involves several key elements:

a commitment to raising the unconscious, a deontologized concept of the archetype, a post-Jungian approach to the female psyche, a spirit of "animity" toward ourselves which allows us to engage our forebears in productive dialogue, and an affirmation of the psychophysical unity of the human person (Lauter & Rupprecht, 1985, p.231).

By "raising the unconscious," Lauter and Rupprecht mean specifically feminine or women's unconscious as opposed to the patriarchal unconscious upon which much of psychological theory is built. Pratt (1985, p. 231) suggests, half-jokingly, that women should have "unconsciousness-raising" groups. "Deontologizing archetypal theory" recognizes archetypes as cultural creations and not inherited, instinctual patterns. "A

post-Jungian approach to the female psyche" means encompassing both the Logos and Eros principles (rationality and love/emotionality) in women. This gives a positive, unifying approach for viewing women's psyche.

Rupprecht (Lauter & Rupprecht, 1985) coined "animity" to replace Jung's divisive anima-animus conception. "Animity" is a unifying principle. It means being friends with the soul and creating the soul using both male and female images. "Psychophysical unity" stresses the indivisibility and equalness of body and soul, mind and matter, nature and culture, etc.

Many feminist archetypal theorists study whole myths and layers of myths in a Gestalt manner. Goddesses and their myths are seen as "transhuman forces" (Downing, 1981, p. 2), i.e. mythical ideals which shape people. Myths present a different kind of knowledge from science and reason; they present a knowledge needed by the soul/mind. Or in the words of a child, "a myth is something that is true on the inside, but not true on the outside" (Johnson, 1983, p. 2). Using myths for developing new role models follows the indirect method of using stories and examples from the Bible, from parables, and from Zen stories for developing cultural roles. Women undergoing midlife

divorce can profit from studying myths and archetypes as they develop new roles for themselves.

Archetypes for Middle-aged Divorced Women

Before describing the Great Goddess archetype, a positive image for divorced middle aged women, less helpful archetypes will be presented. Divorced middle-aged women may unthinkingly follow a dependent archetype. They may continue a dependent role formerly held in their marriage. Middle-aged divorced women may feel inferior, rejected by former husbands and society and may desperately want someone to take care of them.

Dependent women follow a puella or eternal girl archetype, a person fixated at the girlish level of development. The passive Sleeping Beauty archetype is an example of the puella (Leonard, 1982). The puella fears not being taken care of and waits for others in a somnolent manner. To leave the puella role, dependent women need a personal, nurturing mother archetype inside themselves. Ancient mythology is replete with examples of the nurturing mother archetype such as Gaia, the Greek great earth mother who is nurturing, strong and independent, or Demeter, who nurtures others and herself after an initial struggle over her daughter Persephone. Ironically Demeter gains peace by allowing her daughter the independence to grow up and leave the mother. Both

mother and daughter then freely pursue their destinies, including the dark side of themselves symbolized in the journeys to the underworld. Through internalizing such archetypes, puella women can nurture themselves in a strong and healthy manner and learn to depend on themselves.

Women may fear the mother archetype, as well as independence, as women's relationships with their own mothers often simmer uneasily. Revising and redefining "mothering" will aid midlife women learning to "mother" themselves. Such redefinition is needed in our culture as the strong nurturing earth mother archetype is often absent in contemporary society. As Rich (1979, p. 228) so poignantly describes it, "The woman I needed to call my mother was silenced before I was born."

Due to dependency needs and cultural roles, many women fall passionately in love soon after their divorce. An excessive reliance on the new lover develops. To combat excessive dependency, middle-aged divorced women can develop a religious or spiritual archetypes around a nurturing earth mother archetype. Or women can learn from the myth of Iseult (better known as Tristan and Iseult).

Tristan and Iseult were in love with love, not each other, and actually treated each other cruelly. The

Tristan and Iseult myth arose during the period when the romantic love of knights and ladies was developed to replace spirituality and remove power from the church Johnson (1983). Thus, romantic love can be seen as a misplacement of spiritual feelings. Longings, awe, and worship are placed onto human relationships and too much is expected from the love relationship. Many times the first intense love affair after divorce is similar to the Tristan and Iseult myth. It is a dependent type love characterized by being in love with love and not the other person. As dependency needs are not met, the passion wanes. Renouncing an initial romantic love affair is often more painful than divorce because the ending of such a romantic love symbolizes an end to a dependent life-style. Never again will such women depend so entirely on one man for all their needs. Romantic love and dependency are being thrown out as prime archetypes of life. Divorced women, therefore, must beware of the first love affair after divorce, develop independence, and learn to nurture their spiritual selves, perhaps through feminist archetypes.

Another way to look at the tumultuous first loves after divorce is through the Aphrodite myths.

Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty, must be tempered by the part of women represented by Hera and

Demeter, i.e. the more mature wife-mate role and the mother role. Women must integrate all three aspects into themselves for a balanced personality.

Developing non-dependent archetypes is difficult because most cultural roles, myths, stories, and contemporary archetypes describe women primarily in terms of their relationship to men, as spouse, lover, or daughter. Most mythical heroines, Greek goddesses, and Judean-Christian female role-models come from cultures which were attempting to establish a patriarchy, i.e. Old Testament Judaism and Greek myths were developed as these cultures shifted from matriarchies to patriarchies (Bolen, 1984; Perera, 1985). Thus the male-oriented stories were attempting to replace the female fertility religions.

Women are now finding inspiration in the new feminist theology and women's religions which are related to feminist archetypal theory (Christ & Plaskow, 1979; Ruether, 1983; Starhawk, 1982). Non-Judeo-Christian women's religious groups are forming at a grassroots level, developing rituals for women. Some of the new women's religious groups use Greek goddesses while others base their groups on witchcraft and the Druid religion. In spite of coming from patriarchial societies, Greek goddess myths are being

used in feminist archetypal theory and the new women's theology. Greek goddess myths do offer aspects of archetypal images with which middle-aged divorced women can identify. The goddess Artemis from Greek mythology provides an archetype for women learning to live alone or without a adult mate (Downing, 1981). Artemis knows how to use solitude for her own purposes; she teaches the connection between soul and solitude. Artemis deals with the solitude of being single which can frighten newly divorced women. Solitude can force confrontation of hidden needs, one's soul needs, which are often obscured in the closeness of marriage or romantic love.

Later, women may be ready for the marital archetype of Hera, wife of Zeus, who shows roles for relating to a male partner, spouse or long-term intimate lover. Hera continually deals with jealousy, the problem of the Other Woman, and of being intimate yet independent (Stein, 1983, p. 435). The split between the desire for the wife/husband and the other woman/other man relationships can be seen in the tension in the soul for both freedom and intimacy. "Stirring-the-oatmeal" love (Johnson, 1983, p. 195), the calm, friendship-type love, seems more realistic and healthful for middle-aged divorced women.

The most powerful archetype for women is the Great

Goddess who is known throughout early history by many names, Astarte, Ishtar, Inanna, Nut, Isis, Ashtoreth, Au Set, Hathor, Nina, Nammu, Ningal, etc. Inanna, the Sumerian version, seems an especially appropriate archetype for the divorced woman; she is not defined by her relationship to men (Perera, 1985).

The pre-Greek, pre-Biblical Inanna myth offers a wholistic role model. Innana is goddess of earth, sky, matter, spirit, fertility, war, change, rains, storms, passion, sexual love, emotionality, and creativity. She is not shy as she incorporates love and sexuality in an assertive way. She sings "ecstatic songs of self-adornment, desire, and the delights of love-making Perera (1985, p. 145)." The Inanna myth includes a death and rebirth theme. She descends to the underworld (the darker shadow areas of the soul), is killed, and then is resurrected, a Jesus story. As Inanna descends to the underworld on her spiritual quest, she must gradually disrobe, symbolizing the necessary shedding of layers of outmoded cultural ideas. Traditional images must be intentionally discarded as middle-aged divorced women search for new life-enhancing archetypes.

Inanna has a stabilizing counterpart, Ereshkigal, queen of the Netherworld and the dead. Ereshkigal, similar to Artemis, represents a solitude archetype.

Both Inanna's emotionality and Ereshkigal's coldness blend in the myth, symbolizing two forces needed in life. The need for Ereshkigal is stated beautifully as follows:

But when I lose connection to the solidity of that seeming coldness, or try to stave it off as the good mother or daughter, then my ego becomes ungrounded and the coldness falls into the unconscious and comes at me.... Perera (1985, p. 158).

In other words, women must involve themselves in relationships as Inanna does, but must also spend time in solitary pursuits as Ereshkigal does.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Feminist archetypal theory offers archetypes or role models for middle-aged women experiencing lifestyle changes from divorce. Because contemporary society lacks holistic, independent role models for divorced older women, these women may become depressed, angry, and bitter. They may feel they should be married or at least in an intimate relationship with a man. If they begin a relationship, it may be based upon dependency. New self-identities must be developed and new role models found. The Greek goddesses, Gaia, Demeter, Artemis, and Hera, and the Sumerian goddess, Inanna, as

well as the Great Goddess, or mother earth goddess, offer images from whom women can create new life-enhancing archetypes.

To develop new role models, women need to examine their unconscious archetypes and cultural assumptions. Through such methods as meditation, dream interpretation, divorce support groups, individual psychotherapy, women's new religious groups, reading, and religious questioning, middle-aged divorced women can use the crisis as a time of constructive developmental growth. Divorce can be seen as a normal developmental stage for increasing self-identity. For awhile, intimacy needs must be put in the background. Divorced women must acquire many new roles requiring independence and new perceptions: single mother or single person, career woman, friend to men and women, sex partner, financial manager, religious person, and citizen. Feminist archetypal theory can be a source for new images for women undergoing the crisis of midlife divorce.

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